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51 dead in attack on wedding in Turkey

Associated Press

ISTANBUL — A child suicide bomber killed at least 51 people and wounded nearly 70 others at a Kurdish wedding party near Turkey's border with Syria, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said Sunday, decrying the attack as an attempt by Islamic State extremists to destabilize the nation by exploiting ethnic and religious tensions.

The bombing late Saturday in Gaziantep was the deadliest attack in Turkey this year.

It comes amid ongoing struggles between the government and Kurdish militants linked to the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, known as the PKK, and as the country is still reeling from the aftermath of last month's failed coup attempt, which the government has blamed on U.S.-based Muslim cleric Fethullah Gulen and his followers.

Erdogan said immediately after the Gaziantep attack,

which he blamed on the Islamic State group, that any strategy "meant to incite the citizens against each other along ethnic and religious lines will not work."

Later, addressing the nation, Erdogan said the attacker in Gaziantep was aged between 12 and 14. He said 69 people were wounded, with 17 of them in critical condition.

He again blamed the attack on the Islamic State group, but there was no immediate claim of responsibility.

The pro-Kurdish political party HDP condemned the attack on the wedding, which it said was attended by many of its party members.

The party said in a statement that it was "quite significant" that the attack, which it also blamed on the Islamic State group, came only hours after the Kurdistan Communities Union, a militant liberation organization that includes the

PKK, announced plans to try to negotiate to end a three-decade conflict with the Turkish government.

"This attack targets those determined and persistent in peace, resolution, and those struggling for democracy, equality, freedom and justice," the HDP said. "The attack was planned to disable the spread of peace and success of possible negotiations."

A bus driver who shuttled some of the guests from Siirt to Gaziantep said that he couldn't believe the party was targeted.

"This was a wedding party. Just a regular wedding party," Hamdullah Ceyhan told the state-run Anadolu Agency. "This attack was deplorable. How did they do such a thing?"

The bride and groom weren't in life-threatening condition and were undergoing treatment, but the groom's sister and uncle were among the dead, Anadolu reported.

Multiple opposition parties denounced the attack, as did many foreign governments including the United States, Germany, Russia, Egypt, Sweden, Greece, France, Bahrain, Qatar and Jordan.

"We stand by our ally Turkey and pledge to continue to work closely together to defeat the common threat of terrorism," said U.S. Ambassador to Turkey John Bass.

In the Vatican, Pope Francis led hundreds of people in silent prayer for the victims of the attack, concluding by asking "for the gift of peace for everyone."

Security expert Metin Gurcan, a former Turkish military officer and columnist for the online newspaper Al-Monitor, said the Islamic State group views the attack as both retaliation for Syrian Kurdish advances on their forces in Syria, and for Turkey's attacks on Islamic State targets.

Townsend wants end of 'caliphate' on his watch

BY PHILLIP WALTER
WELLMAN

Stars and Stripes

Army Lt. Gen. Stephen J. Townsend took authority Sunday of the U.S.-led coalition fighting the Islamic State group, vowing to destroy the terrorist group's so-called caliphate within a year but admitting the war was far from over.

Townsend, who leads the 18th Airborne Corps, took over from Army Lt. Gen. Sean B. MacFarland of the III Corps, who headed the coalition for nearly a year — a period marked by steady progress in the fight against the militants.

The transition came just days after Iraqi forces pushed Is-

lamic State fighters out of territory near the key western city of Ramadi. Preparations are underway to retake the country's second-largest city, Mosul, which the militants seized two years ago.

Mosul is considered one of the most important battles in the fight against the militant group. Another equally important battle will be for the city of Raqqa in Syria.

"I don't want to make promises, but I intend to have Mosul and Raqqa done on my watch," Townsend told Stars and Stripes on the sidelines of Sunday's ceremony. "With the fall of those two capitals, essentially, you have eliminated the physical

vestiges of the caliphate."

"The enemy at that time [will] have to crawl into holes and little villages in the desert and hide, and it'll become an insurgency, which is a new and dangerous phase in its own right, and we'll have to deal with that," Townsend said. "But right now, my focus is on destroying the physical caliphate."

Gen. Joseph Votel, commander of U.S. Central Command, who spoke at the ceremony, praised the momentum gained by the coalition under MacFarland's leadership. Over the past 11 months, he said, local security forces trained by the coalition recaptured more than 40 percent of the territory previously held by Islamic State

group in Iraq and more than 20 percent in Syria.

The liberation of cities and towns set free nearly 800,000 people in Iraq and more than 1.5 million in Syria, Votel said.

Combined Joint Task Force-Operation Inherent Resolve comprises 64 nations. It focuses on training, equipping, advising and assisting partner forces in Iraq and Syria, which include the Iraqi military, Kurdish fighters known as peshmerga and some Syrian rebel groups. To date, the U.S. and its partners have conducted more than 15,000 airstrikes in both countries. Most of the strikes were from American aircraft and were conducted in Iraq.

Efforts to isolate Putin failing?

BY SETH ROBSON
Stars and Stripes

The leaders of several key U.S. allies have been reaching out to Russian President Vladimir Putin in a sign that efforts to isolate the country over its 2014 annexation of Crimea may be faltering.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, in the midst of a crackdown on suspects in last month's coup attempt, apologized for the downing of a Russian jet by Turkish forces and met Putin in St. Petersburg this month in an effort to rebuild relations, The Associated Press reported.

Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and South Korean President Park Geun-hye will

talk with the Russian president on the sidelines of the Eastern Economic Forum, which runs Sept. 2-3 in Vladivostok, Russia, according to The Japan Times.

New British Prime Minister Theresa May has had a phone conversation with Putin in which the pair "made plans to meet in person in the near future," according to an Aug. 9 Kremlin statement.

The meetings will cut against U.S. and European efforts to punish Russia for annexing Crimea and fomenting civil war in Ukraine via sanctions, financial restrictions, asset freezes, travel bans for Russian officials and the blacklisting of Russian companies.

Abe already met Putin in

May at Sochi, Russia, where the pair discussed Russia's efforts to develop energy-rich Siberian territories in the Far East — a strategy that parallels America's "Pacific pivot," a policy that reflects the Obama administration's view of the region as its highest long-term priority.

Last week, Putin fired his chief of staff and appointed Japan expert Anton Vaino to the job, which involves oversight of Russian diplomacy.

There also have been signs of a thaw between Russia and the United Kingdom. During their phone conversation, Putin and May expressed dissatisfaction with their nations' political, trade and economic cooperation, the Kremlin statement said.

President faces busy fall agenda

Associated Press

EDGARTOWN, Mass. — President Barack Obama is returning from vacation rested and ready for a busy fall, including pressing Congress for money to protect against the Zika virus and fending off lawmakers' attacks over the administration's \$400 million "leverage" payment to Iran.

Obama also is expected to campaign doggedly to help elect Democrat Hillary Clinton as president.

He was due at the White House late Sunday after a 16-day getaway to Martha's Vineyard, Mass., with his wife, Michelle, and daughters Malia and Sasha.

His first order of business is a Tuesday trip to Baton Rouge, La., to survey damage from flooding that killed at least 13 people and forced thousands into shelters.

Obama resisted pressure from Louisianans and others to interrupt his vacation to tour the ruins and meet with officials and flood victims. Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump toured the ravaged area Friday with his running mate, Indiana Gov. Mike Pence, and helped to unload a supply truck.

Obama planned to spend the rest of the week in meetings, largely to prepare for an upcoming, weeklong trip to Asia, his 11th and likely final visit to the region as president.

With Congress still on a seven-week break, Obama and aides probably will focus on what the White House can get from lawmakers before they leave town to campaign for reelection. Congress returns after Labor Day, and the House and Senate will have just a month to pass a catch-all spending bill by the Sept. 30 end of the federal budget year.

Lawmakers plan to leave Washington again at the end of September and not return until after the Nov. 8 elections.

No flood insurance for many in La.

Associated Press

GONZALES, La. — With up to \$150,000 in flood damages to his southeast Louisiana car repair shop and no flood insurance, Lap Nguyen wasn't sure how he was going to repair his life.

He's spent the past few days cleaning out Gonzales Car Care, 20 miles southeast of Louisiana's capital, Baton Rouge, and hadn't thought about the next step.

"I didn't go check with the

bank yet. We did come to clean up the floods," he said in a telephone interview.

Like thousands of other south Louisiana residents, he had to deal with the malodorous muck left after torrential downpours swamped drainage systems, including rivers and streams.

The floodwaters that killed at least 13 people are slowly falling, giving way to the hard slog of cleaning out, rebuilding or just finding somewhere to live.

An estimated 60,000 homes have been damaged, but as-

sessments are continuing so the number may change, Mike Steele, spokesman for the Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness, said Saturday afternoon. He said 102,000 people have registered for federal help.

For the first time since the flooding started, state offices will be open Monday in all parishes, Commissioner of Administration Jay Dardenne said Saturday.

Wind-driven wildfire closes historic Calif. castle

Associated Press

SAN SIMEON, Calif. — A wind-driven wildfire in central California led to more evacuations and the closure of Hearst Castle on Saturday.

Flames from the eight-day-old wildfire in San Luis Obispo County came as close as 3 miles to the national historic landmark, prompting California State Parks officials to cancel

tours and close the grounds to visitors.

A wind shift caused the fire to cross a containment line in the afternoon, leading authorities to issue evacuation orders for several communities north and west of Lake Nacimiento, about 180 miles northwest of Los Angeles, said California Department of Forestry and Fire Protection spokesman Mike Yuli.

The fire has burned 31 square miles and destroyed 48 structures since it began Aug. 13. It is 35 percent contained.

Hearst Castle closes occasionally due to bad weather, but State Parks Supervising Ranger Robert Chambers said he couldn't recall a time when it closed because of a wildfire.

"A fire has never come this close before," Chambers said.

McGregor edges Diaz at UFC 202 rematch

Associated Press

LAS VEGAS — Conor McGregor got his revenge. Now he wants a third fight on his terms.

McGregor evened the score in his rivalry with Nate Diaz by outpointing him Saturday night at UFC 202 in a rematch of their two-round welterweight thriller in March.

The two put on an action-packed fight in which McGregor came out strong and then hung on in a tiring, bloody slugfest. Two of the judges scored it 48-47 for McGregor, and the other had it 47-47.

McGregor immediately challenged Diaz to a third fight—but only if Diaz would come down

to the lightweight division.

McGregor (20-3) forced the action in the opening round, landing multiple leg kicks to Diaz's lead leg and a straight left that knocked down Diaz (20-11).

The Irishman took down Diaz twice more in the second round, bloodying his nose and appearing to have total control of the fight.

The persistent Diaz found his footing later in the second, though, unleashing a flurry of strikes and knocking McGregor against the fence. Diaz continued to attack in the third and, for the final 90 seconds of the fourth, they stood in the center of the cage and exchanged

blows.

They traded punches again in the fifth, and neither gained an edge until the final 10 seconds, when Diaz secured a trip and landed a few final shots from on top before the bell rang.

McGregor exacted revenge for a loss at UFC 196. McGregor, already the featherweight champ, was initially scheduled to face Rafael dos Anjos for the lightweight title, but dos Anjos pulled out due to injury and McGregor agreed to fight Diaz at welterweight on late notice.

They were supposed to battle again at welterweight at the landmark UFC 200, but that bout was canceled after McGregor announced his retire-

ment and refused to meet with media. McGregor didn't end up retiring, but the disturbance got him and Diaz dropped from the card.

Instead, the anticipated rematch was set for UFC 202.

Earlier, Anthony Johnson landed an uppercut 13 seconds into the first round to knock out Glover Teixeira in the co-main event between top-ranked light heavyweights. Johnson (22-5) flattened Teixeira (25-5) with the shot, forcing the referee to call an early end to the fight. Johnson has 13th victories in his past 14 fights.

Donald Cerrone (31-7) stopped Rick Story (19-9) in a battle of ranked welterweights.

Sale ends drought as White Sox top A's

Associated Press

CHICAGO — Chris Sale raced out as the majors' first 14-game winner and was the AL starter in the All-Star game. Then the White Sox ace hit a rut and drew attention not for his pitching, but his jersey-shredding tirade.

After a masterful eight scoreless innings that produced his first victory in 49 days, Sale acknowledged the importance of what he called "getting over the hump."

Sale allowed three hits and threw a season-high 120 pitches, Jose Abreu homered and Chicago beat the Oakland Athletics 6-2 on Saturday night.

Reds 11, Dodgers 1: Brandon Finnegan took a no-hitter into the seventh inning, Adam Duvall and Jose Peraza each hit home runs in returns to the lineup and host Cincinnati beat Los Angeles.

Adrian Gonzalez singled to center field leading off the seventh to break up Finnegan's no-hit bid, and that was the only hit against the 23-year-old lefty.

Cubs 9, Rockies 2: Kris Bryant hit a long homer and drove in four runs, Ben Zobrist had three hits and also went deep, and visiting Chicago routed Colorado.

Mets 9, Giants 5: Yoenis Cespedes hit two long home runs and an RBI double in his second game back from the disabled list, boosting Bartolo Colon and New York past host San Francisco.

Yankees 5, Angels 1: Luis Cessa pitched six scoreless innings to win his first major league start and help visiting New York beat Los Angeles.

Astros 12, Orioles 2: Jason Castro homered and drove in four runs in Houston's second straight blowout victory over struggling host Baltimore.

Diamondbacks 2, Padres 1: Robbie Ray struck out a career-high 13 and gave up just one hit in seven innings, pitching visiting Arizona past San Diego.

Marlins 3, Pirates 1: Xavier Scruggs hit his first major league home run and David Phelps pitched six scoreless innings to help Miami beat host Pittsburgh.

Mariners 8, Brewers 2: Felix Hernandez pitched eight strong innings, Mike Zunino homered and drove in three runs and Seattle sent visiting Milwaukee to its sixth straight loss.

Royals 10, Twins 0: Alex Gordon homered twice and had a double, Ian Kennedy pitched eight sharp innings and host Kansas City beat Minnesota to extend its winning streak to seven games.

Phillies 4, Cardinals 2: Cesar Hernandez homered, doubled and singled, and Jeremy Hellickson pitched seven

strong innings in Philadelphia's victory over visiting St. Louis.

Red Sox 3, Tigers 2: David Ortiz homered after being honored by the Tigers and Boston beat host Detroit on a rainy night.

Nationals 11, Braves 9: Ryan Zimmerman homered and had three hits in his return from the disabled list, and Washington used an eight-run fourth inning to take control before holding off host Atlanta.

Blue Jays 6, Indians 5: Edwin Encarnacion homered, Roberto Osuna bounced back from a nightmarish outing to record the save and visiting Toronto beat Cleveland.

Rays 8, Rangers 2: Evan Longoria and Luke Maile homered, Jake Odorizzi won his fifth game since the All-Star break and host Tampa Bay ended Texas' four-game winning streak.



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Felix, Merritt help US to 31 medals in track

Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO — Allyson Felix and LaShawn Merritt are savvy track stars who've been around long enough to know that not everything always goes to plan.

Over the final 30 minutes of Saturday's topsy-turvy night at the Olympic track, both Americans came away with prizes they'd been wishing for all along.

Those prizes were both golds from the 4x400 relay teams, and the United States exited the final night of action at Olympic Stadium with 31 medals — the most it has taken in a non-boycotted Olympics since 1956, when both the world and track were very different places.

"People are at home watching — watching 2012, watching 2008," said Felix, 30, who wrapped up her fourth Olympics and now has nine total medals. "And when they get their opportunity, they're seizing the moment."

One of those moments looked like it might belong to 41-year-old Bernard Lagat in the 5,000 meters. He actually finished sixth, but three runners ahead of him, including American Paul Chelimo, were disqualified for interference and Lagat briefly moved to third. "Really?" he exclaimed when told about it during post-race interviews.

A review ensued, Chelimo was reinstated to his original silver medal and Lagat was dropped to fifth — a bummer for the elder statesman of the U.S. track team, but some sort of sign for the team: Even when it lost, it won.

But the night's biggest surprise came from Matthew Centrowitz, who shocked the field in a slow 1,500-meter final and became the first American to win gold in

the "metric mile" since 1908. His time was 3 minutes, 50 seconds.

"Doing my victory lap, I literally kept screaming to everyone I know, 'Are you kidding me?'" Centrowitz said.

Felix spent a lot of the week saying the same thing — and not in a good way.

This has been an adjust-on-the-fly year for America's best-known track star — her failure to make the team for the 200 meters, her jaw-dropping silver-medal moment when a diving sprinter from the Bahamas beat her in the 400, and more. But on back-to-back nights, she took relay gold, starting with the 4x100 on Friday. The wins gave her gold medals No. 5 and 6 — a record for a woman on the Olympic track.

In the 4x400, she ran a 49.66-second anchor lap. Over the second and third laps, Americans Natasha Hastings and Phyllis Francis held big leads, only to have them dwindle as they legged out their final meters.

Felix took the green baton about two steps ahead of Jamaica's Novelene Williams-Mills, and slowly, steadily expanded it for a total time of 3:19.06 and a 1.28-second win. Yes, the United States may have relay problems — see, the men's 4x100, which flamed out again the night before — but this certainly isn't one of them. This race has gone to American teams six straight times.

The smile she flashed as she crossed the line and waved the baton said what words could not: Thank goodness, it's finally over.

"The toughest, without a doubt," Felix said of her 2016. "This year, you make plans and want everything to go according to schedule. Nothing went according to schedule."

Merritt might have said the same. He was caught in the tail wind of South African Wayde van Niekerk's world-record 400 run earlier in the week and settled for bronze. Then, Merritt was a bit player in the Usain Bolt going-away party, finishing sixth in the 200 — a race he considered pure gravy.

But Bolt was long gone — having stopped by the track quickly to receive gold medal No. 9 and take a selfie with 5,000 meters gold medalist Mo Farah — and South Africa had left the building, too.

As Felix had done minutes earlier, Merritt took a narrow lead and opened it way up. This relay gold goes with those he took in both the 4x400 relay and the 400 flat in 2008. He was sidelined with injury in 2012.

"The 200 was just extra for me, there was no training regimen for it," the 30-year-old Merritt said. "If I would've medaled, I would've been grateful. But we really wanted to win this 4x4. It didn't go the way the guys wanted it four years ago, so we knew how important it was."

It wasn't all perfect for the red, white and blue. High jumpers Chaunte Lowe, a mother of three who finally felt ready for her Olympic moment, and Vashti Cunningham, daughter of former NFL quarterback Randall, finished fourth and 13th, respectively, in a contest taken by Ruth Beitia of Spain.

In the night's other finals, Thomas Rohler of Germany won the javelin and South Africa's Caster Semenya took the women's 800 meters in a result that surprised nobody.

That the Americans are leaving with the most medals is no shock, either. They've done it at every Olympic track meet since 1992.

Lochte: 'Immature behavior' got him into mess

Associated Press

NEW YORK — American swimmer Ryan Lochte said he over-exaggerated what happened at a Rio de Janeiro gas station and acknowledged it was his "immature behavior" that got him and three teammates into a mess that consumed the final days of the Olympics.

Lochte, in a portion of an interview with NBC's Matt Lauer that aired Saturday, continued backtracking from a story that he initially described as an armed robbery. Police have said the swimmers vandalized a bathroom after a night of par-

tying and armed guards confronted them and asked them to pay for the damage.

"It's how you want to make it look like," Lochte said. "Whether you call it a robbery or whether you call it extortion or us just paying for the damages, we don't know. All we know is that there was a gun pointed in our direction and we were demanded to give money."

But he admitted that he understood that he was being told that the Americans had to pay for the damage or the police would be called.

At that point, Lauer said: "You're striking a deal. Is that

fair?"

"We just wanted to get out of there," Lochte said, adding the swimmers were frightened.

Lauer told Lochte that his story had morphed from one about "the mean streets or Rio" to a negotiated settlement to cover up dumb behavior.

"That's why I'm taking full responsibility for it, because I over-exaggerated the story," Lochte said. "If I had never done that, we wouldn't be in this mess."

Lochte also said he had lied in telling NBC interviewer Billy Bush the next day that a gun had been cocked and pointed

at his forehead. He said he was still under the influence of alcohol when he talked to Bush.

"I definitely had too much to drink that night and I was very intoxicated," he said.

He said he hoped to continue competitive swimming but acknowledged that it won't be his decision about whether he'd be able to be part of the American team again. USA Swimming and the International Olympic Committee could issue sanctions.

Lochte said he regretted how the incident had tarnished Rio and the last week of the Olympics.